



Continuation of uranium and Radiation Exposure Compensation Act advocacy sought by Navajo Nation Council after line item vetoes

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WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — Critical funding for Radiation Exposure Compensation Act (RECA) lobbying efforts facilitated by the Office of the Speaker on behalf of the Navajo Nation Council and members of the Navajo Nation was line item vetoed in the 2021 Comprehensive Budget. As a result, members of the 24th Navajo Nation Council have begun discussions with the Navajo Nation Department of Justice to seek solutions for maintaining lobbying activities in Washington, D.C.

“The Navajo Nation’s position on RECA has been, and continues to be, that this important federal program needs to be reauthorized with the proposed amendments that will expand coverage for Navajos left out of the current Act,” said Council Delegate Amber Kanazbah Crotty (Cove, Toadlena/Two Grey Hills, Red Valley, Tsé’álnáoozt’í’í, Sheepsprings, Beclabito, Gad’ii’áhí/Tó Ko’í). “We call on Congress to reauthorize and expand RECA to rectify the injustice imposed on Navajo uranium miners, downwinders and their families.”

The RECA is set to expire July 2022 and currently provides compensation for individuals affected by uranium exposure due to the US Government’s historical support of ore exploration, mining, refining, transportation and testing activities for use in nuclear atomic bombs.

Included in the Act is support for those affected by the fallout of atomic bomb tests in specific counties located in the southwest US.

“Council delegates have continued to voice support for the reauthorization of RECA by Congress, which gives those Navajo people directly affected by uranium refining activities more time to file for the compensation they deserve,” said Council Delegate Kee Allen Begay, Jr. (Tachee/Blue Gap, Many Farms, Nazlini, Tselani/Cottonwood, Low Mountain).

Delegates were joined by Harrison Karr, principal attorney at the Navajo Nation Department of Justice Natural Resources Unit, who notified delegates that no efforts are currently being undertaken by the NNDOJ to further support RECA lobbying efforts. That support could possibly come after further consultation with the Navajo Nation Washington Office.

Innovative Policy, the Navajo Nation’s former RECA lobbying firm in Washington, closely tracked RECA legislation and provided weekly updates to the Navajo Nation Council regarding Congressional advocacy efforts to reauthorize and expand the law. Those legislation included: The Radiation Exposure Compensation Act Amendments of 2019 H.R.3793, sponsored by then-Rep. Ben Ray Luján, and S.947, sponsored by Sen. Mike Crapo.

“The Navajo People, including those of the badly-affected Cameron and Western Navajo communities, deserve every resource available to recover from uranium mining and nuclear bomb testing. It’s been a long-time coming, and for our relatives in New Mexico, these amendments are badly needed because the fallout from these tests were extensive. Council’s goal is make sure these voices are heard in Washington, and that needs to continue without our vital lobbying resources,” said Council Delegate Thomas Walker, Jr. (Birdsprings, Leupp, Tolani Lake, Coalmine Canyon, Cameron).

The specific amendments sought by the Navajo Nation Council include the addition of San Juan County, McKinley County, Cibola County, Catron County and other counties in New Mexico to the downwinders coverage area under RECA. Currently, no Navajos who lived in the New Mexico area qualify for recompense under RECA.

Additionally, the Council seeks an expansion of eligibility beyond Navajos who were considered uranium miners, uranium millers, ore transporters, “onsite participants” and downwinders to address those who were affected and do not qualify under current RECA law.

The Navajo Nation Council will continue to provide direct advocacy for the reauthorization of RECA and the expansion of eligibility for Navajos across the entire southwest region.

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